

MCKENNAN PARK CELEBRATES A CENTURY

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Publication info: Argus Leader [Sioux Falls, S.D] 07 June 2008: D.8.

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Abstract: Organizers plan family events for August, after renovations have been made, in honor of its centennial BY BRYANN BECKER bkbecker@argusleader.com Sylvia Henkin's memories from living in her home across the street from McKennan Park since 1956 include the daily noises that come from the park. For Henkin, 87, the sounds of voices, laughter and even horseshoes clanking reflect the many events she has witnessed, ranging from weddings to softball tournaments.

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Full text: Organizers plan family events for August, after renovations have been made, in honor of its centennial BY BRYANN BECKER

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Sylvia Henkin's memories from living in her home across the street from McKennan Park since 1956 include the daily noises that come from the park.

For Henkin, 87, the sounds of voices, laughter and even horseshoes clanking reflect the many events she has witnessed, ranging from weddings to softball tournaments.

"My recollections revolve around happy sounds - shrieks of laughter, happiness, cries of, 'I skinned my knee,' " she says. "Even the shrill cries turn out to be a happy event. The predominant sound is of laughter and love."

The sound of a game of horseshoes in the park reminds Henkin, who moved from Sheldon, Iowa, to Sioux Falls in 1944, of her hometown.

"There's nothing more comforting to me than to hear the clink of the horseshoes," Henkin says. "It's a wonderful, resounding echo (that) reminds me of the small communities across South Dakota and Iowa."

When people from the neighborhood and across the city celebrate McKennan Park's 100th birthday in August, Henkin plans to be there, likely chatting and laughing with friends.

Three planning meetings have been held for the McKennan Park Centennial Celebration, Aug. 8-10. Two more meetings are scheduled for 3 p.m. Friday and June 27 at the park's picnic shelter. The celebration will be after renovations at the park are completed in July. Work includes replacing the picnic shelter, expanding the formal garden and redoing the north pathway through the park, says Tory Miedema, park development specialist for Sioux Falls. Both the northwest entrance and Pillars of Nation entrance will be updated, and a retaining wall will be placed around the tennis court edge.

McKennan Park serves as a gathering place for strolling, tennis, entertainment, swimming, games and play for those who make their home near the area.

Paul Schiller, who lives on South Fifth Avenue, regularly totes his camera to the park. Schiller, who takes fine art and nature photography specializing in macro flora images, shoots much of his work in the park. Paul and wife Koni Schiller own a photography business called Acts of Nature.

Koni Schiller said she had thought about moving away from the home where they have lived for the past 11 years, but her husband disagreed.

"The reason why we live in the neighborhood is McKennan Park," Schiller says. "It's very significant that we live near the park."

When Donna Dexter moved to Sioux Falls from Columbus, Ohio, she and her husband looked only for houses near the Cathedral and park districts. She has lived at her house one block off McKennan Park for six years. Dexter continues to enjoy the easy accessibility of her home. She has started walking to the farmers market,

Kaladi's and other locations with the onset of higher gas prices.

"We love being so close to the city," Dexter says. "We'll walk down to Phillips and have dinner."

Dexter sees the importance of celebrating the park's centennial.

"Whenever you have anything historical, it's important to upkeep (that tradition)," Dexter says. "History is the No. 1 draw. It's so important. The people here really feel an ownership (in the park)."

Erica Beck, city senior planner, says organizers hope for an even greater turnout at the next planning meeting. Beck invites individuals to get involved in a living history production that will feature a compilation of memories about the park. The next date for filming segments of the production is June 27 from 1-3 p.m. at the Orpheum Theater and 3-5 p.m. at McKennan Park.

"We're trying to focus on the history of the park itself," Beck says. "We're looking for people to share memories about the park. It's important to document what happened."

Beck says organizers hope to incorporate events, including children's activities, into the celebration that the park's namesake, Helen McKennan, would have appreciated. The celebration will include a nurse's station in honor of McKennan's ties to Avera McKennan Hospital.

The events also will tie in other historic elements. The Great Plains Zoo & Delbridge Museum will bring its ZooMobile to the park, reminiscent of the zoo located in the park in 1915. Community members also are invited to dress in period costumes.

The planning committee is working on souvenir booklets about the park's history, and a centennial tree will be planted to commemorate the occasion. Other events include a tennis tournament and historic walking tours.

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